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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 JEDDAH 000267

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SUBJECT: Avian Flu: Jeddah Slow on Outreach, Otherwise
Taking Proper Steps

Ref: Jeddah 212

¶1. Summary: Jeddah Municipality has an interagency committee on avian flu, a hotline, an emergency plan, and has taken action to control backyard poultry and shop front slaughtering of live birds. They admit that their public outreach strategy is late but otherwise Jeddah appears to be taking the proper steps to prevent and prepare for avian flu. Jeddah has had no confirmed cases of H5N1 avian flu. End summary.

City Services Bureau Sits on Interagency Committee

¶2. Amman-based Regional Environment, Science, Technology and Health (ESTH) Officer and Jeddah Econ Officer met Jeddah Deputy Mayor for Services Khaled Akeel and Dr. Dheya Al-Othmany in Jeddah on March 18 to discuss health issues, and particularly avian flu, in the municipality. Mr. Akeel is responsible for public health and environmental issues in Jeddah, but is not involved with medical care. His department also supervises food safety, trash removal and pollution.

¶3. The city has created an interagency committee on bird flu, Akeel said, and there is also good cooperation with the Mecca Regional Governorate. This committee meets once a week, he said. The committee has developed an emergency plan that includes directives on culling and on quarantine. The Ministry of Agriculture's Jeddah regional office has a lab capable of testing for H5N1 avian flu.

Backyard Flocks and Local Slaughtering Biggest Concerns

¶4. Mr. Akeel said that there are no confirmed human or animal cases of H5N1 avian flu but of course they are concerned. He noted Jeddah's location on the Red Sea flyway and its large local population of crows as possible vectors. Mr. Akeel was not sure if a local agency is monitoring H5N1 in wild birds. His biggest worry is the many small-scale poultry flocks scattered in residences and backyards around the city. Fifty to sixty kilometers outside the city, there are industrial scale poultry farms, but they have professional management, veterinarians, and appropriate health precautions such as protective clothing, boots and foot washes in place.

¶5. The Ministry of Agriculture must license poultry farms, he said. Two weeks earlier, regional and municipal health

and agriculture authorities cooperated to identify and close 49 illegal small farms, he said, under an order from the governor of Meccah province. During the operation, officials destroyed 35,000 chickens. Reftel reports on newspaper coverage indicating bulldozers smashed the coops before culling the birds, leaving thousands of homeless chickens roaming the area.

¶6. The KSAG issued an order two and a half years ago that all local live slaughterhouses should be closed by August 2006. After that, only frozen or chilled chicken meat can be sold; there will be no on-the-spot slaughtering. Akeel spotlighted local live slaughterhouses as a particular source of concern. A recent sweep found that of 204 poultry butcheries in the city, only 38 were found to be in compliance with health standards. All will be closed by the August 2006 deadline, he said.

Public Outreach Plan is Late - Hotline Is Open

¶7. Akeel acknowledged that the avian flu committee's public outreach plan was late, but noted its importance, and said that it was in progress. Jeddah has put in a hotline to field calls and questions from citizens. He said that the hotline gets "all kinds" of calls, that levels of public awareness are high but that the people are not sure what to do in specific situations, e.g. finding dead birds.

¶8. COMMENT: The hotline may exist, but apparently is also the victim of the poor public education campaign. On March 14, Jeddah ACS officer received an inquiry from an American

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living in one of Jeddah's major residential compounds. While discussing the availability of consular services, the American described a problem caused by an increasing number of dead pigeons being found around the compound. He said that compound management had been informed numerous times about the problem. None of the parties involved were aware of the existence of a "hotline." END COMMENT.

Dengue Fever Also a Concern

¶9. Jeddah has seen a jump in the number of cases of dengue fever during the last two months, and the city is looking for a contractor to manage mosquito control. Post will submit a cable addressing Dengue Fever in the near future.

¶10. Comment: Post is defining its emergency contingencies and tripwires per Department guidance, and is responding to inquiries from Amcits on avian flu.

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